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ADOLESCENT HEALTH IN NORTH CAROLINA: THE LAST 15 YEARS

by

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ABSTRACT

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In response to growing concern about adolescent health issues, this report examines a wide range of health indicators for North Carolinians aged 10-19 years. Results show some positive trends: the percentages of pregnant adolescents entering early prenatal care and using ancillary prenatal services have increased; fetal and infant mortality among adolescent mothers has declined; and adolescent mortality from motor vehicle and other unintentional injuries has dropped. For most other indicators examined in this report, however, findings provoke concern about a wide range of health and social problems. These findings include rising levels of adolescent pregnancy, unmarried childbearing, sexually transmitted disease, homicide, suicide, and crime as well as high prevalences of behaviors and risk factors that often underlie those events. Accordingly, many county health departments now rank adolescent health issues among their top priorities. This study also reveals deep race and sex disparities in health outcomes and behaviors. These disparities must be a prime consideration in formulating prevention strategies.

Both a national initiative, *Healthy People 2000*, and a corresponding state initiative, *Healthy Carolinians 2000*, address some of the problems of adolescence through the formulation of health objectives for adolescents and young adults. The present report provides data for a number of those objectives and points up certain data deficiencies that need to be addressed (see Conclusion). Meanwhile, indicators from the biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Department of Public Instruction) will be used to track progress toward the risk reduction objectives for the Year 2000.

The North Carolina General Assembly, through the Division of Maternal and Child Health, is now funding a limited number of school-based health centers and local adolescent pregnancy prevention programs, as described in this report. Based on present findings, expanded funding of those initiatives is amply justified and required.

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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, AND NATURAL RESOURCES